

## THE FUTURE OF NEWS



DWAYNE CARPENTER/TIMES-DISPATCH

## Gen Z's embrace of visual, verbal and viral media

BY CHRIS GENTILVISO AND DEB AIKAT

Remember when news was separated out by medium? Readers read the newspaper. Viewers watched television. Listeners turned on the radio. Media in the 21st century adopts no such singularity. The desire to read a story, see a place or hear a voice comes together simultaneously online.

As technology integrates our media experiences, Generation Z or "post-millennials" — people born in 1997 or later — provide critical insight into the changing nature of news. From Aug. 7 to 10, hundreds gathered in Toronto for the 102nd annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), a nonprofit, educational association of journalism and media educators, students and media professionals.

The conference theme was "Invest-

ing in our Futures," and for the media, that includes a better understanding of our youngest adults' consumption habits. We presented our research — a meta-analytical review of 20 key studies published between 2017 and 2019 — on how post-millennials' embrace of visual, verbal and viral media is reshaping the news for people of all ages.

Unlike baby boomers, Generation X, and even some millennials, studies show Generation Z reads less and watches or listens more. A 2018 report by Brodeur Partners found half of post-millennials picked YouTube as their preferred platform. That same year, a Business Insider survey of 104 Gen Zers found 6 in 10 chose social media as their place to consume news.

For post-millennials, technology is innate. They seek room to self-tailor their media experience by contributing content and interacting with oth-

ers. For example, successful upstart newsletters like theSkimm share tips on how to live smarter — an offering that fuels engagement. Seeing the growth of such lifestyle content, The New York Times now has a "Smarter Living" section and newsletter.

No matter how fresh or established the news outlet is, its value stems from content that encourages everyone to join the conversation. The journey starts with a pitch of "What's right for you?" It's a departure from gatekeeping: "This is what the journalist thinks is right for you to know."

Consumers' power to customize their news is encapsulated by an online exchange of personal values. Thanks to social media, post-millennials are more politically active than any other generation. At the ripe age of 13, teens can open accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube (with a parent's permission) and

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## SPANBERGER



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## A little luck could go a long way

A couple weekends ago, Abigail Spanberger appeared at a fundraiser in Richmond's Westover Hills for Ghazala Hashmi, a Virginia Senate candidate whose district overlaps with hers and whose opponent in the Democratic primary was backed by Spanberger.

This weekend, the frosh congresswoman planned a drop-by at the western Henrico County headquarters of local and legislative candidates, several of whom won in 2017, as she did in 2018, on an anti-Trump wave that, Democrats hope, crests again in 2019.

Showing up counts a lot in politics.

And Spanberger has been highly visible, not just in the Republican rural counties of the 7th District, which previously elected a Democrat in 1968 — one of the conservative, Old South strain who often aligned with the GOP.

Spanberger is among 31 Democrats elected last year to the U.S. House of Representatives from Trump-carried districts and whose survival next year will decide continued Democratic control.

So, Spanberger — and Republicans would tell you this is clever by half — tailors her message accordingly, hanging back on impeachment and not making an endorsement — for now — for her party's presidential nomination.

Put another way: She is partisan where votes are plentiful; nonpartisan where they are not.

And that's OK with many voters in those parts of the 7th District that, arithmetically, matter most: the increasingly blue subdivisions of western Henrico and northwestern Chesterfield County.

In Henrico, Spanberger's majority over a two-term Republican incumbent, Dave Brat, a Trump imitator, was 20,000 votes. Her advantage in Chesterfield: 10,000.

A Republican challenger next year would have to take back many of those votes.

That's not easily done in Henrico and Chesterfield if you're on a ticket led by Donald Trump, who in 2016 lost the former and barely won the latter while sweeping the 7th District's thinly populated rural expanse.

Plus — and this is a reminder to never underestimate luck in politics — Republican prospects for the Spanberger seat have complications separate from an unpopular president.

Trump already has cost the GOP its majority in the state's congressional delegation. He could do the same at the state Capitol, where a few seats each in the House of Delegates and state Senate stand between Republicans and oblivion.

The only announced candidate against Spanberger, Tina Ramirez, as an unknown, is not considered much of a threat, despite early backing by national Republicans.

For some possible candidates, problems are near term. Siobhan Dunnivant of Henrico and Glen Sturtevant of Chesterfield have to hold Senate seats in blue-trending districts.

For others, there are image headaches. Pistol-packing Sen. Amanda Chase of Chesterfield got cross — and crosswise — with an African American police officer. Sen. Bryce Reeves of Spotsylvania County is seen as a gay-basher, having called attention to Democratic Sen. Adam Ebbin's sexual orientation during an NRA town hall.

Del. Nick Freitas of Culpeper

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## CAMILLE, GASTON

## Grim reminder for Virginia business owners

This month marks significant anniversaries for two of the most notable storms ever to hit the commonwealth of Virginia. On Monday, it will have been 50 years since Hurricane Camille first knocked on Virginia's doorstep. The deadly Category 5 hurricane killed 153 people and caused an inflation-adjusted \$977 million worth of damage in the state alone.

Three and a half decades later, Gaston — which hammered central Virginia as a tropical storm before being reclassified as a Category 1 hur-

ricane — dropped nearly a foot of rain in some areas and left much of Richmond under water. Interstate 95 and more than 120 local roads had to be closed because of flash flooding. At least 1,000 residents were forced from their homes and several buildings in the downtown area were condemned.

Even now, 15 years later, many Richmond businesses

are still feeling the lingering effects of Gaston. What's more troubling is that many of those businesses are no longer around.

According to FEMA, an estimated 40% of businesses do not reopen after a natural disaster, with an additional 25% failing within the following year. No business, large or small, is immune to these dangers. Even storms in nearby localities or disasters that occur in other states can disrupt manufacturing, supply chains or communications that local businesses rely upon to serve

### Camille: A special report

Read about the people who survived the storm and how they are doing now, in today's paper.

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their customers and generate revenue.

For these reasons, it's vitally important that business owners take the necessary precautions so that they don't find themselves in the 65% of businesses that close their doors because of the effects of natural disasters, like hurricanes.

The Virginia State Corporation

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Robert N. Bradshaw Jr.



OPINIONS

LEAVING THE GOP

Voters don't have to settle for binary choice

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich.

It is difficult to discourage and impossible to manage Justin Amash because he, unusual among politicians, does not want much and wants nothing inordinately. He would like to win a sixth term as congressman from this culturally distinctive slice of the Midwest.



George Will

He does not, however, want it enough to remain in today's Republican Party, which he has left because that neighborhood has become blighted.

Amash, 39, a founding member of the House Freedom Caucus, also has left that once-admirable faction because he does not define freedom as it now does, as devotion to the 45th president.

He is running as an independent, which might accomplish two admirable things: It might demonstrate that voters need not invariably settle for a sterile binary choice. And it might complicate Donald Trump's task of again winning Michigan's 16 electoral votes, which he did in 2016 by just 0.2 percentage point.

With a city named Holland

and a college named for John Calvin, western Michigan's culture reflects its settlement by Dutch Americans, who set about vindicating Max Weber's connection between the "Protestant ethic" and the "spirit of capitalism," a spirit incubated in 17th- and 18th-century Amsterdam. Distinguished Michigan denizens of Dutch descent have included Peter De Vries, America's wittiest novelist.

Local Christian schools drummed into Amash and other young sinners fear of a particular moral failing: pride. His one-word description of his constituents — "modest" — suggests an aversion to vanity, vulgarity and ostentation that has an obvious pertinence to the leader of Amash's former party. Amash compares western Michiganders — culturally, not theologically — to Mormons.

Trump carried 16 states by larger margins than he carried Utah, and won only 51.6% in Amash's district, which traditionally has been the epicenter of Michigan Republicanism.

"I think," Amash says dryly, "the Trump people are confounded by this area," where Trump held his final 2016 rally.

A few hours after Amash declared his independence from the husk of the Republican

Party, he marched in several Independence Day parades where "I got an overwhelmingly positive feeling." This might indicate increased negative feelings about Trump, who carried Michigan by just 10,704 votes out of 4,799,284.

In Amash's single term in the state legislature, he cast the only "no" vote on more than 70 measures. In 2013, he had the gumption to vote against reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act for no better reason than that there was no reason for it, and it was inimical to federalism: It "created new federal crimes to mirror crimes already on the books in every state." His average margin of victory in four re-election contests has been 15.1 percentage points.

Amash, the son of a Palestinian refugee who arrived in western Michigan in 1956, is philosophically unlike Grand Rapids' most famous son, whose philosophic interests were few and did not include Amash's favorite Austrian economists (Von Mises, Hayek).

Amash, however, shares Gerald Ford's devotion to the idea, if not the actuality, of Congress. Ford's pipe, loud sport coats, decency and legislative seriousness validate a famous judgment: "The past is a foreign



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan listened to committee debate during a congressional hearing in June.

country: They do things differently there."

Presently, Congress is rarely a legislative, let alone a deliberative, body. Two years ago, when Republicans controlled the House, a Republican congressman defended a committee chairman accused of excessive subservience to the president by saying: "You've got to keep in mind who he works for. He works for the president. He answers to the president." Pathetic.

Because congressional leaders live in terror of spontaneity among the led, hearings designed to generate publicity are tightly scripted, which is why, Amash says, such hearings are "an elaborate form of performance art" and members "often look as though they are asking questions they do not understand."

Congressional leaders' stern message to potentially unman-

ageable members is to pipe down and "live to fight [for spending restraint, entitlement reform, open House processes, etc.] another day." Amash's campaign slogan should be: "Vote for someone who is as disgusted with Congress as you are."

The Libertarian Party might ask Amash to take his — actually, it's the Founders' — message to the nation as the party's presidential nominee. He does not seek this — he has three young children — but does not summarily spurn the idea of offering temperate voters a choice of something other than a choice between bossy progressivism and populist Caesarism. Or he could become the first non-Republican the Grand Rapids area has sent to Congress since 1974.

Contact George Will at georgewill@washpost.com. © 2019, Washington Post Writers Group

Schapiro

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County has difficulty with details. He is running as a write-in because he screwed up a basic responsibility for an incumbent: getting on the ballot.

Del. John McGuire of Henrico, as a freshman, might be too green for Washington.

For 7th District Democrats, their first priority is Spanberger's re-election to a second term. It could be a cakewalk after that. In 2022, the district will have been redrawn, possibly friendlier to a Democrat.

Re-election is a task that demands Spanberger, who already has raised more than \$1 million for 2020, finesse her views on Trump.

She does not want to rile the wrong people: right-wing Republicans committed to Trump, and independents — Republican-leaning until Trump — who believe voters, not Congress, should kick him out.

That means for Democrats, on the sensitive topic of dumping Trump, there are a lot of winks and grins.



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Rep. Abigail Spanberger, D-Va., runs in a Trump-won district with a wink and a grin.

Spanberger, over coffee in downtown Richmond before dashing to Nottoway County, the rural southern terminus of the 7th District, makes clear she is no fan of Trump.

But on the question of impeachment, she shades her answers. Spanberger said she is more interested in the House doing its job; that is, continuing its investigation on possible presidential crimes.

Before she can say whether Trump should be removed, "I want to know the facts and evidence," said Spanberger, who, with fellow Virginians Elaine Luria and Jennifer Wexton, was among 137 Democrats who voted against

a July measure to impeach the president.

Wink, grin.

And Spanberger is similarly circumspect on whether Trump is a racist.

Wink, grin.

Del. Schuyler VanValkenburg, one of those Democrats who two years ago rode hostility to Trump to what was a Republican House seat, has been walking his Henrico district this summer.

VanValkenburg said voters are telling him their concerns are the kitchen-table variety, not the threatened constitutional crisis over Trump's conduct.

"I just don't get the sense that's where the average voter in the 7th is," VanValkenburg said. "They want someone who's good at their job, focuses on health care, schools ... someone who's working, trying to find consensus, if possible."

Wink, grin.

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start to debate.

Post-millennials also have niche digital outlets to address issues such as race, class and gender. Platforms such as The Root, The Marshall Project and Refinery29 provide a sharper lens than some forms of generalist, mainstream media. As Generation Z comes of age, these are examples of how the media is a motivator to get involved in public policy issues.

As a result, Generation Z's desire for a specialized news diet has journalists rethinking how to position their coverage. A 2018 study by Lynn Schofield Clark of the University of Denver and Regina Marchi of Rutgers University found interpersonal connectivity on social media helps high school students foster voice and collective identity within their neighborhoods.

While communities still have newspapers, radio and television, new media ventures supporting this vision are on the rise, like Chicago's City Bureau. The nonprofit collaborative unites journalists and the public to share skills, information and resources on topics of concern.

Take voting rights. In 1964, The New York Times visited Southern cities to assess compliance with the Civil Rights Act. The verbal component was in-person interviews. The visuals were cartoons reflecting viewpoints and a map. The viral element was missing.

In 2019, that's no longer an issue online. Projects like ProPublica's Electionland feature interactive, cross-channel tools that track troubles at the polls through user participation such as text messages, WhatsApp and a Facebook page.

Connective journalism practices — the merging of thousands of voices and identities in one shared digital sphere — help news outlets build rapport in minutes with sources or subscribers. But the new landscape is rife with risks, led by misinformation.

Post-millennials enjoy sensory journalism that engages their eyes and ears. As technology advances into new territory such as virtual reality, Brodeur Partners found nearly half of millennials and post-millennials prefer news media with augmented elements, versus 20% of baby boomers.

Artificial capabilities are tilting news in unexplored directions. The consistency of daily newspapers or evening newscasts is challenged by the public's visual, verbal and viral sharing in on-demand settings.

Over the past decade, we've

learned "news" on Twitter can be just one remark or an appearance by an influencer. Back in the spring, "Lake Okeechobee" was trending because of a visit to Florida by President Donald Trump. Forty years ago, a news story on the president's trip would have been reasonable on Page A1 of a newspaper, or an 11 p.m. newscast.

But in late July, another trending topic was "the war over bone-in and boneless wings wages on." "So, which side are you on?" asked the Twitter forum. The ease of digital information is not exclusive to journalism or news. Original reporting is intertwined with life updates and casual conversations.

Generation Z is pushing media purveyors in all forms to quickly capture its attention, regardless of medium. It lives in an 8-second world, snacking on news bits across self-selected devices and platforms.

Legacy companies are responding with new ideas such as Bloomberg's TicToc, a Twitter-centric streaming network. "NBC Nightly News" found a place on YouTube, where rather than waiting for the "up next at 6:30 p.m." promo, consumers stop, start, skip and add comments.

Newspapers are not only in print. The New York Times recently waded into TV with "The Weekly," a half-hour documentary series on FX and Hulu (an on-demand option). The verbal, visual and viral are embraced in this investigative reporting series.

When big news breaks, from the death of Jeffrey Epstein to the Hong Kong protests, headlines on washingtonpost.com (a newspaper), npr.org (a radio station) and cnn.com (a television station) look markedly similar. But while some readers stay loyal to long-standing sources, others are prone to volatile, polarized views of the same events. "News" can come from anyone, including unknown sources or fake accounts.

The general public is news' most formidable competitor. If we can't grasp future audiences' embrace of visual, verbal and viral media, consumers can — and will — create their own networks, with or without truth. That's why we, as media professionals, must keep paying attention.

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Bradshaw

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Commission's Bureau of Insurance sent out a reminder earlier this month for business owners to plan now for disasters, and I urge local business owners to take that message to heart.

Throughout my career in the insurance industry, I've found that a great number of individuals and business owners don't always understand what is included in their policy and, more importantly, what is not. In the event of a claim, these unknowns can lead to tens of thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses, or worse, closing a business's doors for good.

For example, standard policies do not cover the damage typically associated with hurricanes and other natural disasters, such as flooding. It's vitally important that all Virginians, but especially business owners, regularly review their insurance policies and make adjustments, as needed.

For most businesses, especially those in high-risk areas such as coastal regions or flood zones, it's a good idea to consider business interrup-



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Tropical Storm Gaston in 2004 left behind scores of water-logged cars caked in mud in Richmond's Shockoe Bottom.

tion insurance, which covers the loss of income that your business might lose following a disaster. The SCC also recommends considering separate automobile insurance policies, since standard business insurance covers only real property.

So, before a named storm is hovering over our heads and threatening Virginia, there are a few things you can do to make sure your business is prepared.

The most important is to take the time to sit down and thoroughly evaluate your business and its needs with your insurance agent. Deter-

mine whether your business is located in an area that is at an especially high risk of natural disasters. Develop a detailed plan on what you will do if a storm hits your area. Ensure that your documents are stored in a safe place and that all electronic records are backed up on a regular basis.

To put it simply, be prepared. After all, it could be the difference between being in that 65% or seeing your business prosper for many years to come.

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